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Inaugural Dissertation

on

Emansio Mensium

by

J. Watts Bowie

of

South Carolina

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Amenorrha has been divided by systematic writers into the retention and the suppression of the menses. Deriving its consequence from the obscurity of the causes producing it, as well as the difficulty which is experienced in its treatment and cure, retention of the menses presents itself to us in a very interesting and important light. Expending its violence on the fairest part of our species, the subject is on this account eminently calculated to excite a spirit of research in the minds of an enlightened physician, with the hope that his labours may end in the acquisition of such knowledge as will enable him in most instances to mitigate or entirely remove the miseries attendant on the disease. At the age of puberty a discharge takes place from the female which is called menstrual, and which is said by some to be a secretion, while others

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affirm that it is pure coagulable blood. The period at which this discharge occurs, varies in different countries, being later in cold, and earlier in hot climates. In Lapland we are told the females do not menstruate until the age of twenty, whereas, in Persia, it occurs at the age of nine. The catamenia is also influenced in the time of its appearance by civilization, peculiarities of constitution, and habits of life. The Indian women of North America do not menstruate before the age of eighteen or twenty, as stated by Dr Rush. Dr Dewees alleges that the discharge occurs in females of the city, earlier than in those of the country, and every physician has had occasion to observe, that it is often postponed beyond the ordinary period of its establishment, without at all affecting the health of the individual thus circumstanced. In this country however, the

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average period at which the menses make their appearance, is, between the fourteenth and fifteenth years ~~of~~ of age, according to Dr Dewees. When the discharge does not take place at this time, much anxiety is experienced by the friends of the girl, in whom it fails to make its appearance, whose restless spirit of uneasiness remains unappeased until some effort is made to establish the discharge, which they consider of primary importance to the welfare of the individual. But the retention of the menses is not to be looked upon as a disease merely from the circumstance of their not appearing at that period of life when they usually show themselves in most other women. They are sometimes much later than the average time noticed in making their appearance which may be owing as has been stated, to idiosyncrasy or modes of living, without in the least affecting

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the health of the female. It is impossible to fix any precise period of time for the flow of the catamenia which as a general rule will be applicable to all the sex. It is therefore not from the age of the person that a retention of the menses is to be considered a disease, and consequently requiring medical treatment; but when about the time they usually appear, some disorders arise in other parts of the body which may be imputed to their retention, then, and not until then does the female become a legitimate subject of medical discipline. As this discharge is essentially dependent on a healthy development and sound condition of the ovaries and uterus, without this state of these organs exists in vain will all efforts prove on the part of the physician to establish the secretion. The healthy development of this system of the

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female is considered by Cullen as necessary to the production of this discharge, and the opinion is supported by all writers on midwifery. Dr Dewees in his work on obstetricks, relates the case of a young lady, who, at the age of twenty eight had never menstruated, which was owing in all probability to the imperfection of the uterus. The importance of the ovaries is not less important in this process, since the flow of the catamenia is always prevented in a diseased state of these organs or where excision has been performed. In a very large majority of cases however, the retention of the menses is owing to a general debility of the system as stated by Dr James, which opinion is abundantly supported by the testimony of others. It is only when the disease arises from this cause that we can hope for much success in its treatment. As the views taken of this disorder by Dr Dewees contra=

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ces every possible condition of the female system in which it can exist, I shall deliver the treatment of it in the various states he has pointed out, and in the order he has detailed.

From the very strong sympathy that exists between the genital organs and other parts of the body, any defect in them, will readily be detected by an entire or partial absence of those signs which usually characterise the age of puberty. A girl in whom those signs are wanting which denote womanhood, such as a general development of the whole body, enlargement of the mammæ, protrusion of hair on the pubes &c, cannot be considered a proper subject of medical treatment, especially if she enjoy good health, and time alone can bring about that desierable change in the parts which it were folly in man to attempt. If however a gradual debelopement of the uterus

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and ovaries appear to be taking place, which will be indicated by the partial appearance of these signs during puberty, and fluor albus, together with a train of nervous symptoms should attend, then will the case demand the prompt attention of the practitioner. The indications of cure in this case will be the general in=vigoration of the system by tonics, the cold bath and exercise. A suppression of the leucorrhœa is to be attempted by the administration of the tinc. of cantharides or the madder. A deter=mination to the uterus is to be effected by a persevering course of purging with aloes or the compound tinc. of rhubarb with myrrh.
Should a retardation in the growth of the genital organs be occasioned by a chronic affection of any other part of the body, in which case a retention of the menses will of course be induced, a removal of the

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cause can alone obviate the effect. Where there appears to be a healthy conformation of these organs of the female, which will be discovered by all those signs that denote non-an lower being present, and the menstrual process does not take place at the proper time, recourse should be had to medicines for their ~~relief~~ production. In this case, flux albus often attends, and there is frequently an evident manifestation of an attempt to produce the discharge by the instigation of pains in the loins, back, and hips, with a fulness in the pelvis, and a bearing down. As it is in this condition of the female system that retention is found most frequently to exist, it would seem from this circumstance to demand very particular attention in pointing out the treatment proper to be pursued under such circumstances. But it has been found from experience that the disease under this con-

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dition of body almost invariably yields to the remedies recommended in partial development of the genital organs, so that any addition would be superfluous. Electricity has been considered as a valuable resource in this disease, and is held in some estimation by Dr James, but from the trials I have seen made with it in other affections I am disposed to question its efficacy in any disorder. During my attendance on the practice of the Alms-house of this city, I have had an opportunity of seeing several cases of this disease treated, but which proved ineffectual in every instance. This was owing probably to an imperfection of the genital organs of the patients, since the signs which characterise the perfection of these parts were wanting. A girl eighteen or twenty years of age was brought into the infirmary during the last summer, labouring under

retention of the menses in its most aggravated form. She was presented to the class more with the view of exhibiting the horrible ravages which the disease is capable of making on the system, than with any hope of relieving her melancholy situation by the use of medicines. In this case the signs of puberty were entirely wanting. The general health of the patient was good, except at those periods when the menstrual discharge should have taken place in obedience to a healthy law of nature. At this time there was a violent struggle of the system producing epileptic convulsions and mania. In consequence of the repeated insurrections of the system in this case, without any decided relief, the girl was fast hastening the period of confirmed idiocy. The treatment directed in this case, although an hopeless one, was pediluvium of brine, issues in the legs just below the knees, friction to the thighs

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sacrum and pubic regions, comp. tinct. of aloes with myrrh in drachm doses three times a day, leeches to the anus and vulva, and injections of ammonia into the vagina. She was ordered to be bled in the foot if epileptic convulsions threatened, which was done, and successfully repelled the threatened attack, once at least, according to the report of a very intelligent student of the house. Notwithstanding this course of treatment was persevered in for some length of time, it failed proved altogether unavailing and failed to give the poor girl the least relief. Of the remedies recommended in the former part of this dissertation, together with those which were resorted to in the case just detailed, fail to relieve the patient labouring under a retention of the menstrual discharge, the case may be considered as irremediable, and the pa=

tient must be relucantly abandoned by the physicians, to linger out a melancholy existence a burthen to herself, and an object of commiseration to her friends.

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